

The Pick-a-Party Primary

Introduction

On July 15, 2005, a Federal District Court ruled Initiative 872's version of the top two primary as unconstitutional and "the law as it existed before the passage of Initiative 872, including the Montana primary system, stands as if Initiative 872 had never been approved." The pick-a-party primary, modeled after the Montana primary, was used in both the 2004 and 2005 Primary Elections. Under this system, voters must limit their choices to one political party's slate of candidates for partisan offices but may vote on all nonpartisan races.

Partisan offices include congressional, statewide, legislative, and most county offices. Nonpartisan offices include the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, judges, mayors, city council members, port commissioners, fire commissioners, school board members, and other special district commissioners.

Candidates Filing for Office

Major Parties

Washington currently recognizes the Republican Party and Democratic Party as major parties because they received more than five percent of the total votes cast for President, Vice President, United States Senator, or a statewide office in the 2004 General Election. Under the pick-a-party system, major party candidates file for office in July as they have under Washington's previous primary systems. Major party candidates do not have to be endorsed or nominated by a political party in order to file a declaration of candidacy.

Minor Parties and Independent candidates

Under the pick-a-party system, minor party and Independent candidates do not appear on primary ballots but advance directly to the general election. To appear on the general election ballot, minor party and Independent candidates must be nominated at a convention and have either 100 or 1,000 signatures of registered voters, depending on the office. Nominating documents must be submitted to the filing officer no later than seven (7) days after the close of the convention. A declaration of candidacy and the filing fee must be filed no later than July 28, 2006.

The Primary Election

As in the 2004 and 2005 Primary Elections, if a county has at least one partisan race on the ballot, the County Auditor will decide whether the voters in that county will receive either a consolidated ballot or physically separate ballots. A consolidated ballot is a single ballot on which a voter selects a party and votes only for candidates within that party designation, even though all parties appear on the ballot. Nonpartisan races and issues are also included on the ballot. A physically separate ballot is a ballot specific to a single major political party, as chosen by each voter. It also includes nonpartisan races and issues. A nonpartisan ballot may be selected instead if the voter does not want to vote on any partisan races. A voter's party preference is not recorded in the public record.

The General Election

Regardless of whether consolidated or physically separate ballots are used, each major party candidate that receives the most votes for a race advances to the general election. Minor party and Independent candidates who have held conventions and received the appropriate number of valid signatures also appear on the general election ballot. Voters are free to choose any political candidate for office, regardless of party affiliation. The votes for each candidate are counted, and the candidate who receives the most votes in a race is declared the winner.